

was the great rise in rents which took place during the seventeenth century, a phenomenon not merely due to the greed of landlords, as some writers assert, but also to the increasing yield of the soil and the spread of tillage. The policy of the government was steadily directed to encouraging the production of corn and stock. Under Charles II Irish and Scottish cattle were excluded from England for the benefit of the English farmer, and the export of corn was permitted until it rose above a certain price in England.¹ An Act passed in 1689 established a bounty of 55. per quarter on the export of home-grown corn. This law was, ' by a general consensus of opinion, successful, both in maintaining prices at a steady level, and in giving a stimulus to English agriculture, during the first half of the eighteenth century/ ² Adam Smith's strictures on the law are well known.

The country gentlemen, who then composed a still greater proportion of the legislature than they do at present, had felt that the money price of corn was falling. The bounty was an expedient to raise it artificially to the high price at which it had frequently been sold in the times of Charles I and II. It was to take place, therefore, till wheat was so high as forty-eight shillings the quarter ; that is twenty shillings, or fths dearer than Mr. King had in that very year estimated the grower's price to be in

times of moderate plenty. If his calculations
deserve any
part of the reputation which they have
obtained very
universally, eight-and-forty shillings the
quarter was a
price which, without some such expedient as
the bounty,
could not at that time be expected, except in
years of
extraordinary scarcity. But the government
of King
William was not then fully settled. It was in
no condition
to refuse any thing to the country gentlemen,
from whom

¹ Cunningham, op. cit. i. 371-3, 540, 546.

- Ibid. ii. 723 ; cf. i. 541.